

**MAX FREEDMAN**

## Column Hitting CIA Stirs Row

**Sensitive Response Shows Emotion  
Aroused by Controversy on Viet Nam**

The other day I wrote a column which was very critical of the recent role of the Central Intelligence Agency in Viet Nam. The article caused quite a stir in the administration, where it spread more pain than enlightenment. Apparently the suspicion has taken hold that I was used by some of my friends in the State Department as part of a campaign to discredit the CIA.

I do not have to defend myself against this suspicion. I am not that kind of a journalist, and, unless I deceive myself, few can think I am.

There is, however, one public issue that deserves attention. The sensitive response to the column is an indication of the deep emotions aroused by the debate over Viet Nam. Quite plainly, the administration cannot do its work if important officials are afraid of a sneak attack. This is the only question that will be discussed here, and I can best do it in personal terms.

In general, my views on Viet Nam are rather similar to those expressed over many months by Senator Mansfield. I think many avoidable mistakes have been made in that country and are being made even now. I go beyond Senator Mansfield in believing that even a defeat for American policy in Viet Nam would be far less serious to American interests in Asia than we have been led to believe.

One night I said all this to a friend. He was startled by what he regarded as my levity of judgment and undertook to teach me the real facts about Viet Nam. As a result I wrote a column defending the reasons which support the present policy.

That column was finished the day before the President's last news conference. Not a word had to be changed by what he said.

Any satisfaction which I might have had at this result soon disappeared when I received a call from the State Department. My caller expressed surprise and sadness that anyone as friendly to the administration as I am could have written about the complicated and protracted debate on Viet Nam with so little acknowledgment of the wisdom in the State Department's case.

My friend who had given me the first briefing never had any thought of being unfair to the State Department. He was so eager to educate me that he had no time for other matters. Later and more extensive discussions resulting from that disturbing call convinced me that an unintentional injustice had been committed against the State Department. Now it so happens that the good name of the State Department has always meant a great deal to me; and so I agreed to do a second column.

It should be evident from this history that nothing could be more remote from the truth than the suspicion that someone in the State Department wanted to use me to strike a dirty blow at the Central Intelligence Agency. The facts forbid any such conclusion.

But it was not easy to write that second column, given the point of view expressed in the first piece. For I had said that there was no clear or simple alternative to the Diem Government or to the present policy. It was

made plain to me that this conclusion, standing by itself, did less than justice to a very complex story, and events in Viet Nam had to be seen in a much larger context. I then wrote with more than my customary sharpness, not because I was trying to do a hatchet job on anyone in the CIA, but because my mind was still smarting from what I had come to regard as my unfairness to the State Department. I am quite sure that the CIA, if it wished, could go over the record to prove that the State Department's wisdom, too, has sometimes faltered.

There is really only one justification for this fragment of journalistic history. By its very nature the CIA is the only agency, apart from the Supreme Court, that cannot defend itself in public against criticism, whether fair or unfair. The criticism which it has received over the years has made the CIA peculiarly sensitive and vulnerable to attack. The plain fact is that no one yet has proposed anything that will solve the problems of Viet Nam. So the debate will continue with vehemence and deep conviction, as it should, and in that debate the CIA is well able to hold its own. And it can do so by looking firmly at Viet Nam and not looking anxiously over its shoulder at the State Department.

By my own standards, I have already been punished. I had intended to write a column today in tribute to T. S. Eliot on his 75th birthday. Now that is a really important subject, unlike the quagmire in Viet Nam. I suppose I will now have to defer my tribute to the great poet until his 80th birthday, by which time all of us, I trust, will have forgotten the miseries of Viet Nam.

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